

SPECIFICATION

NETWORK FACSIMILE APPARATUS
BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a network facsimile apparatus capable of performing transmission and reception of facsimile data and e-mail data connecting to a PSTN and a network such as the internet or LAN.

Description of the Related Art

Recently, it has been performed to connect a personal computer, work station, FAX server or the like to a network in order to transmit and receive an e-mail and facsimile and to browse homepages.

FIG.1 illustrates a system structure of the case of performing facsimile transmission and reception using a FAX server. The reception operation at a client machine (personal computer) will be described next. FAX modem 1001 receives a call from the PSTN (Public Switched Telephone Network) and fetches image data to transmit to FAX server 1002. FAX server software operating at FAX server 1002 receives the image data, and stores the image data as an image data file at file server 1003 through the network. At this point, the storage of facsimile received data is finished.

To fetch the received image data into client machine 1004, a user starts a dedicated application at client machine 1004 and reads out the image data from file server 1003 through the network.

Further, a method of reusing facsimile received data by combining an internet FAX and a WWW server has been recently proposed. The method utilizes the function of the internet FAX which converts data received from the PSTN into an e-mail.

5 FIG.2 illustrates a system structure of the case of performing facsimile transmission and reception using an internet FAX and a WWW server. The reception operation at the client machine will be described.

10 Image data received at internet FAX 1101 via the PSTN is converted into an attached file format to an e-mail at internet FAX 1101 and is transmitted to WWW server 1103 as an attached file of e-mail.

15 The e-mail with the attached file transferred from internet FAX 1101 is received at e-mail server 1102 via a network. The e-mail with the attached file received at e-mail server 1102 is transferred to WWW server 1103 that is a destination again via the network.

20 WWW server 1103 stores the attached file of e-mail as image data to link to a homepage for facsimile reception. The storage of facsimile received data is finished at this point.

25 In order to fetch received data into client machine 1104, a user starts a WWW browser at client machine 1104 and accesses to the homepage for facsimile reception at WWW server 1103. The user reads out an image data file at client machine 1104 via the network from WWW server 1103.

However, in the system using the above described FAX server, since image data is transferred two times through a

network, i.e., from the FAX server to the file server and further from the file server to the client machine until the client machine receives facsimile received data, there is a problem that network traffic is increased.

5 Further, there is another problem that the system requires cost for a dedicated application which is needed to transmit and receive facsimile data at a file server for storing facsimile received data and a client machine.

In addition, in the conventional system using the above-
10 described FAX server and WWW server, since image data is transferred three time through a network, i.e., from the internet FAX to the e-mail server, further from the e-mail server to the WWW server, and furthermore from the WWW server to the client machine until the client machine receives
15 facsimile received data, and image data attached to e-mail has a data capacity approximately 1.3 times that of binary data, there is a problem that the network traffic is further increased.

Further, there is another problem that the system requires cost for a workstation as a WWW server and a dedicated application which is needed to open received data as a homepage.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An object of the present invention is to provide a network
25 facsimile apparatus which is able to decrease network traffic caused by data transmission.

Another object of the present invention is to provide

a network facsimile apparatus which is able to transmit and receive image data through a network with an inexpensive configuration without requiring dedicated hardware and software.

5 The network facsimile apparatus of the present invention has a facsimile section which transmits and receives an image via the PSTN, a network communication section which transmits and receives data via a computer network, a storage having a storage area at which received data including an image received
10 at the facsimile section and the data received at the network communication section are stored and another storage area at which a structured document is stored, and a web server which transmits the received data or the structured document stored in the storage to the computer network.

15 According to the present invention, the network facsimile apparatus is able to issue a homepage of the apparatus own toward outside, which enables the network facsimile to communicate information including image data with an external terminal using the home page. Further, since the
20 present invention enables the network facsimile connected to the network to have a WWW server function, it is possible to use the internet inexpensively with a plain configuration without requiring a dedicated terminal for operating server software.

25 In addition, the network facsimile apparatus of the present invention has a reception list generating section which generates a structured document of reception list indicative

of document information of the received data stored in the storage, and the web server transmits the structured document of reception list to the client via the computer network in response to a request from the client.

5 According to the above configuration, since it is possible to obtain data received and stored at the network facsimile apparatus using WWW browser software at a network client, it is thereby possible for a user of a personal computer who does not have a facsimile apparatus to receive facsimile
10 image data using the existing software.

 In addition, the network facsimile apparatus of the present invention holds stored file information which is generated in document structure markup language such as HTML, transmits the file information to a terminal which accesses
15 to the apparatus with a URL address, and transmits or prints a predetermined file or transmits the file to another terminal when receives an instruction from the terminal.

 According to the above processing, it is possible for a network client to easily reuse data once stored. For example,
20 it is possible for a user of a personal computer who does not have a facsimile apparatus to transmit facsimile image data using the existing software.

 In addition, the network facsimile apparatus of the present invention transmits data, which is transmitted from
25 the terminal connected to the network facsimile apparatus by a network, to another terminal by facsimile.

 According to the above processing, it is possible to

directly transmit data, which the network client manages, by facsimile.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

5 The above and other objects and features of the invention will appear more fully hereinafter from a consideration of the following description taken in connection with the accompanying drawing wherein one example is illustrated by way of example, in which;

10 FIG.1 is a configuration diagram of a system using a conventional FAX server;

 FIG.2 is a configuration diagram of a system using a conventional internet FAX and WWW server;

15 FIG.3 is a schematic block diagram illustrating a configuration of a network facsimile apparatus according to an embodiment of the present invention;

 FIG.4 is a configuration diagram of a network system using the network facsimile apparatus according to the above embodiment;

20 FIG.5 is a flowchart to explain a reception operation at the network facsimile apparatus according to the above embodiment;

 FIG.6 is a flowchart to explain an operation for transmitting data stored at the network facsimile apparatus according to the above embodiment to a client machine;

 FIG.7 is a diagram illustrating a content of FAX reception list at the network facsimile apparatus according

to the above embodiment;

FIG.8 is a diagram illustrating a content of a homepage at the network facsimile apparatus according to the above embodiment

5 FIG.9 is a flowchart to explain an operation for transmitting data stored at the network facsimile apparatus according to the above embodiment;

10 FIG.10 is a flowchart to explain an operation for transmitting a document file of the client machine after storing the file at the network facsimile apparatus according to the above embodiment; and

15 FIG.11 is a flowchart to explain an operation for transmitting status information generated at the network facsimile apparatus according to the above embodiment to the client machine.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE

PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

The embodiment of the present invention will be described
20 below in detail with reference to drawings.

FIG.3 illustrates a schematic block diagram of a network facsimile apparatus according to an embodiment of the present invention. In FIG.3, CPU 1 controls over the entire apparatus. ROM 2 is a read only memory to store programs, in which each program for HTML file generating section 11, WWW server section 25 12, e-mail communication section 13 and TIFF conversion section 14 is stored. RAM 3 is a memory used for data of programs stored

in ROM 2. RAM 3 is also used to store e-mail software with the software e-mail address held and URL addresses. External storage 4 is a storage such as a hard disk and used to store compressed image data and HTML files. Scanner 5 scans image data of, for example, an original. Printer 6 performs printing of received image data or scanned imaged data. A user is able to perform operations such as an instruction to scan image data and an enter of destination address using panel section 7. Compression/expansion section 8 performs expansion of received image data and compression of scanned image data. FAX/speech communication section 9 performs facsimile communication and speech communication connecting to a PSTN. Network control section 10 performs the internet communication connecting to a network. HTML file generating section 11 generates, for example, a list of received image data as a HTML file which is readable on a homepage. WWW server section 12 performs communications with WWW browser software in accordance with HTTP protocol to exchange homepage data (HTML files). E-mail communication section 13 performs transmission and reception of e-mail via a network, while functions as an e-mail server. TIFF conversion section 14 converts coded facsimile data and document file data into TIFF format.

FIG. 4 is a diagram illustrating a system configuration in the case of using a network facsimile apparatus according to the embodiment of the present invention. In FIG. 4, network facsimile apparatus 201 is connected to the PSTN, while has

a network interface. Network facsimile apparatus also has the WWW server section and the e-mail communication section as illustrated in FIG.3. Client machine 202 operates a WWW browser to browse a homepage.

5 The reception operation of the network facsimile apparatus configured as described above will be described according to a flowchart in FIG.5.

At step (hereinafter abbreviated as ST) 301, it is decided whether the reception is performed via the PSTN or the
10 internet. At ST302 to ST307, when the reception is performed via the internet, e-mail communication section 13 receives the e-mail. When attached data is image data in TIFF (Tag Images File Format) that is a standard format for an image file, e-mail communication section 13 stores the image data at external
15 storage 4 providing a file name such as, for example, "mail0001.tif". When attached data is speech data, e-mail communication section 13 stores the speech data at external storage 4 providing a file name such as, for example, "audio0001.wav". When the reception is performed via the PSTN,
20 FAX/speech communication section 9 receives imaged data or speech data. When the received data is image data, FAX/speech communication section 9 requests TIFF conversion section 14 to convert the coded data into TIFF format. FAX/speech communication section 9 provides a file name such as, for
25 example, "fax0001.tif" to the TIFF-converted received data to store at external storage 4. When the received data is speech data, FAX/speech communication section 9 converts the speech

data into digital data and provides a file name to the speech data to store at external storage 4. In addition, it is possible to talk with a receiver after buzzing at the network facsimile apparatus depending on the setting.

- 5 HTML file generating section 11 manages a reception list table, illustrated in FIG. 7, stored in external storage 4. At ST308, when HTML file generating section 11 receives a file name, which is provided to the received data, from FAX/speech communication section 9 or e-mail communication section 13,
- 10 HTML file generating section 11 adds the file name to the reception list. In addition, at this stage, a document number that is provided in order of storing, a title of e-mail notified from e-mail communication section 13 (in the case of facsimile reception, a fixed character sequence such as "G3FAX received
- 15 document), data registered to the reception list table, and sender name are also stored. HTML file generating section 11 next updates a HTML file used in displaying the reception list on the browser, based on the updated reception list table. Specifically, HTML file generating section 11 reads the HTML
- 20 file that is prepared in advance to display a FAX reception list page illustrated by 602 in FIG.8 and writes a character sequence indicative of, for example, document number that is newly stored management data in the reception list table illustrated in FIG.7 in order to edit. "0001" that is a
- 25 character sequence of the edited document number is tagged with , thereby the character sequence "0001" is linked to a file of fax0001.tif that is the received file.

At ST309, when received data is speech data, the processing is finished.

The network facsimile apparatus is able to set printer 6 to print the received image data instantly after the received 5 image data is stored in external storage 4.

At ST310, it is judged whether or not the setting is the instant printing. When the setting is not the instant printing, the reception operation is finished. When the setting is the instant printing, at ST311 to ST312, compression/ expansion 10 section 8 decompresses the image data stored in TIFF format at external storage 4 to output to printer 6. Printer 6 prints the decompressed data.

The operation of transmitting data received and stored at the network facsimile apparatus to a client machine will 15 be described next according to a flowchart in FIG.6. At ST 401, the network facsimile apparatus is in a stand-by state until a homepage address (URL address) is entered. At ST402, the client machine connected to a network starts a WWW browser (homepage browsing software) and enters the URL address of the 20 network facsimile apparatus to access the homepage. In the accessed network facsimile apparatus, at ST403, WWW server section 12 initiates the processing through network control section 10, and transmits homepage data (HTML file) stored in external storage to the WWW browser of the client machine. 25 According to the aforementioned processing, at ST404, the homepage of the network facsimile is displayed at the client machine, for example, as illustrated by 601 in FIG.8. The

network facsimile apparatus awaits at ST405 until next selection is performed.

At ST406 to ST408, when a user selects "FAX reception list" among from displayed data, the network facsimile apparatus transmits the HTML file of FAX reception list linked to the character sequence of "FAX reception list" to the client machine, and the FAX reception list is thereby displayed on the WWW browser at the client machine as illustrated by 602 in FIG.8. The network facsimile apparatus awaits at ST409 until next selection is performed.

At ST410 to ST412, when a user selects a file to display among from the FAX reception list, the network facsimile apparatus transmits an image data file. The image data (for example, file0001.tif) is displayed on the WWW browser at the client machine using the helper application to display the TIFF file as illustrated by 603 in FIG.8.

The aforementioned example describes about the case of displaying FAX received data. However, when a speech file is selected, the speech data linked to the speech file is played back at a speaker of the client machine. The speech data includes speech data that the user records at a receiver of the network facsimile apparatus besides the speech data received from outside, and it is possible to link these speech data to the homepage and also to transmit toward outside.

The next description illustrates the operation in the case where the WWW browser at the client machine performs transmission of the network facsimile apparatus. As the

transmission operation, there are two cases of transmitting data stored at the network facsimile apparatus and of transmitting a document file at the client machine.

The case of transmitting data stored at the network
5 facsimile apparatus is first described with a flowchart in FIG.9. At ST701, the network facsimile apparatus is in a stand-by state until a homepage address (URL address) is entered. At ST702, the client machine connected to the network starts the WWW browser (homepage browsing software),
10 and enters the URL address of the network facsimile apparatus to access to the homepage. At ST703, in the network facsimile that receives the access, WWW server section 12 initiates the processing through network control section 10, and transmits homepage data (HTML file) stored in external storage 4 to the
15 WWW browser at the client machine. According to the aforementioned processing, at ST704, the homepage of the network facsimile is displayed at the client machine (601 in FIG.8). At ST705, the network facsimile apparatus awaits until next selection is performed.

20 At ST706 to ST708, a user selects an object file on the page illustrated by 602 in FIG.8, and pushes "send" button. At ST709, the network facsimile apparatus transmits a page for instructing transmission (not shown). At ST710, the page is displayed at the client machine. At ST711 to ST713, when the
25 user designates a destination facsimile number or destination e-mail address to perform a transmission instruction, WWW server section 12, to which the transmission instruction is

provided, starts a CGI program for transmission with a CGI interface and performs the transmission processing.

The next description illustrates the case where the network facsimile apparatus transmits a document file stored at client machine with reference to a flowchart in FIG.10. At ST801 to ST802, a user of the client machine opens an object document file using, for example, word processor software, and designates the network facsimile as a printer and performs the same instruction as printing.

At ST803 to ST805, network control section 10 at the network facsimile apparatus receives transmission data from the client machine, instructs TIFF conversion section 14 to convert the data into TIFF format, provides a file name to the converted file and store the file at external storage 4. Further, network control section 10 notifies the HTML file generating section of the storage of the file.

At ST806, HTML file generating section that receives the notification adds the file information to a reception list table illustrated in FIG.7, while updates the HTML file for displaying the file information on the browser.

As described above, the document file at the client machine is temporarily stored at the network facsimile apparatus. The network facsimile apparatus then transmits the temporarily stored data in the same way as transmitting the stored data illustrated in FIG.9. In the case of only printing without transmitting, it is possible to transmit the data to printer 6 to print.

The above-description illustrates the case of storing transmission data temporarily at external storage 4 to transmit. However, it may be possible for a user to enter a facsimile number or e-mail address when instructs printing so 5 that the send program is started by the CGI interface immediately after the transmission data is converted into TIFF format in order to transmit the data.

The next description illustrates the operation in which a user performs the device setting of the network facsimile apparatus using the WWW browser at the client machine. The homepage of the network facsimile apparatus provides an enter 10 page adapted to enter various device settings such as user setting and destination registration. A user of the client machine starts the WWW browser, accesses to the homepage of 15 the network facsimile apparatus and displays the page for performing object device setting. For example, when the user opens the setting page concerning a send, designates a fine as a character size, and pushes "setting" button, WWW server section 12 executes the setting program linked to the "setting" 20 button with the CGI interface to perform the setting of the network facsimile apparatus.

The next description illustrates the operation in which the network facsimile apparatus generates the device status in HTML file with reference to a flowchart in FIG.11. At ST901, 25 scanner 8, printer 6, panel section 7 and FAX/speech communication section 9 always directs changes of own respective status.

At ST902 to ST903, when a state change occurs, for example, paper is out of stock at printer 6, printer 6 notifies HTML file generating section 11 of change content.

At ST904, since HTML file generating section 11 holds
5 in advance many HTML files to display status (device status) information and GIF files to display a status with a picture, HTML file generating section 11 updates the contents of HTML files and changes GIF files whenever a status changes.

When a user of the client machine refers to the status
10 (device status) information, at ST905 to ST912, the user starts the WWW browser, displays the homepage of the network facsimile and selects respective status information on scanner 8, printer 6, panel section 7 and FAX/speech communication section 9 to display, which enables the user to know the latest device status
15 at any time.

In addition, the network facsimile apparatus updates the content of HTML files and changes GIF files at the time a device status changes even though a user of the client machine is accessing to the homepage of the network facsimile, the user
20 is able to know a device status at real time.

The present invention is not limited to the aforementioned operation. It may be possible to generate other information such as facsimile communication log and facsimile apparatus manual in HTML file in order to enable a
25 user to read the information with the WWW browser.

The present invention is not limited to the above described embodiments, and various variations and

modifications may be possible without departing from the scope
of the present invention.

This application is based on the Japanese Patent
Application No.HEI 10-274920 filed on September 29, 1998,
5 entire content of which is expressly incorporated by reference
herein.